

**IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF GEORGIA
BRUNSWICK DIVISION**

ROBERT TROY ALTMAN,

Petitioner,

v.

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA,

Respondent.

CIVIL ACTION NO.: 2:15-cv-141

(Case No.: 2:14-cr-15)

ORDER and MAGISTRATE JUDGE'S REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION

This matter comes before the Court on Robert Altman's ("Altman") failure to comply with the Court's Order to keep the Court apprised of any change in his address. For the following reasons, I **RECOMMEND** that the Court **DISMISS without prejudice** Altman's Motion to Vacate, Set Aside, or Correct his Sentence, filed pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 2255, (doc. 1), due to Altman's failure to prosecute and failure to follow this Court's Order. I further **RECOMMEND** that the Court **DENY** Altman *in forma pauperis* status on appeal and **DENY** Altman a Certificate of Appealability.

BACKGROUND

Altman filed a Section 2255 Motion alleging claims of ineffective assistance of counsel, (doc. 1-2), as well as a motion to seal that pleading, (doc. 1), on September 23, 2015. The Court granted Altman's Motion to Seal on October 21, 2016. (Doc. 2.) However, the Court's Order, (doc. 2), was returned as undeliverable on October 31, 2016. (Doc. 5.) On December 2, 2016, the Court ordered Altman to advise the Court of his current address within fourteen (14) days.

(Doc. 9.) The Court emphasized that, should Altman fail to comply with this directive, the Court would dismiss his case. Id.

On December 12, 2016, the Court's Order dated December 2, 2016, was also returned as undeliverable. (Doc. 10.) Altman has not notified the Court of his change of address or made any effort to inform the Court of his whereabouts. Indeed, Altman has not taken any action in this case since September 23, 2015.

DISCUSSION

The Court must now determine how to address Altman's failure to comply with this Court's directive. For the reasons set forth below, I **RECOMMEND** that the Court **DISMISS without prejudice** Altman's Section 2255 Motion, **DENY** Altman leave to appeal *in forma pauperis*, and **DENY** Altman a Certificate of Appealability

I. Dismissal for Failure to Prosecute and Failure to Follow this Court's Order

A district court may dismiss a petitioner's claims *sua sponte* pursuant to either Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 41(b) ("Rule 41(b)") or the court's inherent authority to manage its docket. Link v. Wabash R.R. Co., 370 U.S. 626 (1962);¹ Coleman v. St. Lucie Cty. Jail, 433 F. App'x 716, 718 (11th Cir. 2011) (citing Fed. R. Civ. P. 41(b) and Betty K Agencies, Ltd. v. M/V MONADA, 432 F.3d 1333, 1337 (11th Cir. 2005)). In particular, Rule 41(b) allows for the involuntary dismissal of a petitioner's claims where he has failed to prosecute those claims, comply with the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure or local rules, or follow a court order. Fed. R. Civ. P. 41(b); see also Coleman, 433 F. App'x at 718; Sanders v. Barrett, No. 05-12660, 2005 WL 2640979, at *1 (11th Cir. Oct. 17, 2005) (citing Kilgo v. Ricks, 983 F.2d 189, 192 (11th Cir.

¹ In Wabash, the Court held that a trial court may dismiss an action for failure to prosecute "even without affording notice of its intention to do so." 370 U.S. at 633.

1993)); cf. Local R. 41.1(b) (“[T]he assigned Judge may, after notice to counsel of record, *sua sponte* . . . dismiss any action for want of prosecution, with or without prejudice[,] . . . [based on] willful disobedience or neglect of any order of the Court.” (emphasis omitted)). Additionally, a district court’s “power to dismiss is an inherent aspect of its authority to enforce its orders and ensure prompt disposition of lawsuits.” Brown v. Tallahassee Police Dep’t, 205 F. App’x 802, 802 (11th Cir. 2006) (quoting Jones v. Graham, 709 F.2d 1457, 1458 (11th Cir. 1983)).

It is true that dismissal with prejudice for failure to prosecute is a “sanction . . . to be utilized only in extreme situations” and requires that a court “(1) conclud[e] a clear record of delay or willful contempt exists; and (2) mak[e] an implicit or explicit finding that lesser sanctions would not suffice.” Thomas v. Montgomery Cty. Bd. of Educ., 170 F. App’x 623, 625–26 (11th Cir. 2006) (quoting Morewitz v. West of Eng. Ship Owners Mut. Prot. & Indem. Ass’n (Lux.), 62 F.3d 1356, 1366 (11th Cir. 1995)); see also Taylor v. Spaziano, 251 F. App’x 616, 619 (11th Cir. 2007) (citing Morewitz, 62 F.3d at 1366). By contrast, dismissal without prejudice for failure to prosecute is not an adjudication on the merits, and, therefore, courts are afforded greater discretion in dismissing claims in this manner. Taylor, 251 F. App’x at 619; see also Coleman, 433 F. App’x at 719; Brown, 205 F. App’x at 802–03.

While the Court exercises its discretion to dismiss cases with caution, dismissal of this action without prejudice is warranted. See Coleman, 433 F. App’x at 719 (upholding dismissal without prejudice for failure to prosecute Section 1983 complaint, where plaintiff did not respond to court order to supply defendant’s current address for purpose of service); Taylor, 251 F. App’x at 620–21 (upholding dismissal without prejudice for failure to prosecute because plaintiffs insisted on going forward with deficient amended complaint rather than complying, or

seeking an extension of time to comply, with court's order to file second amended complaint); Brown, 205 F. App'x at 802–03 (upholding dismissal without prejudice for failure to prosecute Section 1983 claims, where plaintiff failed to follow court order to file amended complaint and court had informed plaintiff that noncompliance could lead to dismissal). With Altman having failed to update the Court with his current address, the Court has no means by which it can communicate with Altman. Thus, the Court is unable to move forward with this case. Moreover, Altman was given ample time to follow the Court's directive, and Altman has not made any effort to do so. Additionally, Altman has not taken any action in this case in over fourteen months.

Thus, I **RECOMMEND** the Court **DISMISS without prejudice** Altman's Section 2255 Motion and **DIRECT** the Clerk of Court to **CLOSE** this case.

II. Leave to Appeal *in Forma Pauperis* and Certificate of Appealability

The Court should also deny Altman leave to appeal *in forma pauperis*. Though Altman has, of course, not yet filed a notice of appeal, it would be appropriate to address these issues in the Court's order of dismissal. Fed. R. App. P. 24(a)(3) (trial court may certify that appeal of party proceeding *in forma pauperis* is not taken in good faith "before or after the notice of appeal is filed"). An appeal cannot be taken *in forma pauperis* if the trial court certifies that the appeal is not taken in good faith. 28 U.S.C. § 1915(a)(3); Fed. R. App. P. 24(a)(3). Good faith in this context must be judged by an objective standard. Busch v. Cty. of Volusia, 189 F.R.D. 687, 691 (M.D. Fla. 1999). A party does not proceed in good faith when he seeks to advance a frivolous claim or argument. See Coppedge v. United States, 369 U.S. 438, 445 (1962). A claim or argument is frivolous when it appears the factual allegations are clearly baseless or the legal

theories are indisputably meritless. Neitzke v. Williams, 490 U.S. 319, 327 (1989); Carroll v. Gross, 984 F.2d 392, 393 (11th Cir. 1993). Stated another way, an *in forma pauperis* action is frivolous and, thus, not brought in good faith, if it is “without arguable merit either in law or fact.” Napier v. Preslicka, 314 F.3d 528, 531 (11th Cir. 2002); see also Brown v. United States, Nos. 407CV085, 403CR001, 2009 WL 307872, at *1–2 (S.D. Ga. Feb. 9, 2009).

Additionally, under 28 U.S.C. § 2253(c)(1), an appeal cannot be taken from a final order in a habeas proceeding unless a certificate of appealability is issued. A certificate of appealability may issue only if the applicant makes a substantial showing of a denial of a constitutional right. The decision to issue a certificate of appealability requires “an overview of the claims in the habeas petition and a general assessment of their merits.” Miller-El v. Cockrell, 537 U.S. 322, 336 (2003). In order to obtain a certificate of appealability, a petitioner must show “that jurists of reason could disagree with the district court’s resolution of his constitutional claims or that jurists could conclude the issues presented are adequate to deserve encouragement to proceed further.” Id. “Where a plain procedural bar is present and the district court is correct to invoke it to dispose of the case, a reasonable jurist could not conclude either that the district court erred in dismissing the petition or that the petitioner should be allowed to proceed further.” Slack v. McDaniel, 529 U.S. 473, 484 (2000); see also Franklin v. Hightower, 215 F.3d 1196, 1199 (11th Cir. 2000). “This threshold inquiry does not require full consideration of the factual or legal bases adduced in support of the claims.” Miller-El, 537 U.S. at 336.

Based on the Certificate of Appealability standards set forth above, there are no discernable issues worthy of a certificate of appeal; therefore, the Court should **DENY** the issuance of a Certificate of Appealability. If the Court adopts this recommendation and denies

Altman a Certificate of Appealability, Altman is advised that he “may not appeal the denial but may seek a certificate from the court of appeals under Federal Rule of Appellate Procedure 22.” Rule 11(a), Rules Governing Section 2255 Cases in the United States District Courts. Furthermore, as there are no non-frivolous issues to raise on appeal, an appeal would not be taken in good faith. Thus, the Court should likewise **DENY** *in forma pauperis* status on appeal and **DENY** Altman a Certificate of Appealability.

CONCLUSION

For the above-stated reasons, I **RECOMMEND** that the Court **DISMISS without prejudice** Altman’s Motion to Vacate, Set Aside, or Correct his Sentence, filed pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 2255, and **DIRECT** the Clerk of Court to **CLOSE** this case. I further **RECOMMEND** that the Court **DENY** Altman *in forma pauperis* status on appeal and **DENY** Altman a Certificate of Appealability.

The Court **ORDERS** any party seeking to object to this Report and Recommendation to file specific written objections within fourteen (14) days of the date on which this Report and Recommendation is entered. Any objections asserting that the Magistrate Judge failed to address any contention raised in the Complaint must also be included. Failure to do so will bar any later challenge or review of the factual findings or legal conclusions of the Magistrate Judge. See 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1)(C); Thomas v. Arn, 474 U.S. 140 (1985). A copy of the objections must be served upon all other parties to the action. The filing of objections is not a proper vehicle through which to make new allegations or present additional evidence.

Upon receipt of Objections meeting the specificity requirement set out above, a United States District Judge will make a *de novo* determination of those portions of the report, proposed

findings, or recommendation to which objection is made and may accept, reject, or modify in whole or in part, the findings or recommendations made by the Magistrate Judge. Objections not meeting the specificity requirement set out above will not be considered by a District Judge. A party may not appeal a Magistrate Judge's report and recommendation directly to the United States Court of Appeals for the Eleventh Circuit. Appeals may be made only from a final judgment entered by or at the direction of a District Judge. The Court **DIRECTS** the Clerk of Court to serve a copy of this Report and Recommendation upon Altman.

SO ORDERED and REPORTED and RECOMMENDED, this 19th day of December, 2016.



R. STAN BAKER
UNITED STATES MAGISTRATE JUDGE
SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF GEORGIA